

Generations planting towards continuous cover

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There's rarely a year goes by that Bryan Hennessy doesn't plant a tree. In addition to his mixed woodlands, many individual or small groups of trees are dotted around his farm near New Ross in County Wexford.

His interest in trees extends beyond basic timber production and he has planted native but also many unusual species such as Southern beech, Coastal Redwood, Spanish Chestnuts among others.

It's 85 years since planting began in Ballymacar. Bryan's late father, Denis Hennessy planted a hill field with Larch and Scots Pine when planting by farmers was almost unheard of. Thus began a lifetime of tree planting which continues to this day. Bryan remembers his father's love of trees and inherited his enthusiasm for planting woodlands and single trees around the farm.

Taking into account the steep terrain and heavy soils of some other fields on the farm, Bryan and his wife Helen took the decision to plant more trees in 1997. Forestry offered a better return than sheep on this difficult ground. Douglas Fir, Sitka Spruce, Oak, and Ash were planted. In 2003, an area of Beech and Scots Pine was added.

Knowledge and interest in trees

Bryan says landowners have a responsibility to manage farms with an eye on the future: "I believe in a whole-farm approach which increases and maximises income but also improves environmental sustainability." Additional tree planting over many decades, along with the installation of a pond in a wet part of the farm, provides a safe haven for many species of wild animals and birds.

Learning to manage farm woodlands

The initial forest was thinned in the 1970s using horses to extract the timber. It was never clear-felled; but instead was under-planted with Western Hemlock, Beech and Scots Pine so even then, the idea of "continuous cover" was being embraced.

"I think there is a responsibility on forest owners to acquire at least a basic knowledge of forest management," says Bryan.

He takes every opportunity to learn: he attends Teagasc forest walks and events, Irish Timber Growers Association events, is actively involved in the Irish Wood producers (a local forest owner group) and more recently has begun attending events presented by Prosilva Ireland (an organisation that promotes the development of Continuous Forest Cover in Ireland).

Bryan also took part in the new Forest Knowledge Transfer Group Scheme which facilitates forest owners to discuss forestry issues and experiences.



Bryan's granddaughters Molly and Hannah plant new trees around the farm.

Armed with this knowledge, Bryan worked with the Irish Wood Producer Group to help harvest and market his thinnings. Conifers were thinned to produce some pallet wood and the rest went for pulp wood. This pulp was stacked on site to dry and then chipped and delivered to local energy users in Wexford.

Bryan stresses the importance of supervising timber harvesting and sales: "No farmer would allow any other product off their farm without being clear on how much there is and what it's worth; why should timber be any different?"

The broadleaves were also thinned for firewood, availing of the woodland improvement grant. These broadleaves are now due another thinning

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intervention and can take advantage of the new second woodland improvement grant recently launched (see box on page 37).

The Future

Bryan is proud of the value he has added to his farm through planting. This value comes in many forms: the timber produced now and into the future, the added value to the landscape with the many hedgerow and

parkland trees along with improved habitats that exist alongside the day to day farming.

He likes nothing better than to talk about trees to anyone who will listen! He especially enjoys passing on his knowledge to his grandchildren.

Bryan does not envisage clear-felling his forests under any circumstances. He hopes that through careful management tree cover can remain as new generations of trees are encouraged to grow. He welcomes the recent launch of the new Continuous Cover Forestry Scheme which will pilot this forest management approach on suitable sites.

Forest Owners like Bryan see the worth of schemes but also the longer term benefits.

"Planting offers welcome value in the short term through grants and premiums but its real value continues for generations," he concludes.

Three new schemes to support sustainable forest management

1 Continuous Cover Forestry Scheme

This scheme supports the production of commercial timber while retaining forest cover at all times. Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) is an alternative forest management approach where the forest canopy is maintained at one or more levels without clear-felling. Natural regeneration is encouraged but natural regeneration can be supplemented by planting if required.

The scheme comprises of a CCF Transformation Management Plan that runs for a period of 12 years with three instalments of €750/ha occurring at intervals throughout a 12-year period.

2 Second thinning intervention for broadleaves

This scheme provides financial support to forest owners towards the cost of a second intervention to thin broadleaf forests (€500/ha). This is in addition to the already existing first thinning grant under the Woodland Improvement Scheme (€750/ha). Thinning operations supported under this scheme must have the potential to improve the quality of the crop and be carried out at least four years after the completion of works for the first intervention and before the crop reaches 15m top height.

3 Deer Tree Shelters and Deer/Hare Fencing Scheme

This scheme provides financial assistance to landowners growing broadleaves in areas where there is a risk of deer/hare damage. Deer and hares are capable of inflicting serious damage to trees (in particular broadleaves). For instance: browsing damage, bark stripping, fraying damage as well as damage to the drainage system. Support for deer tree shelters is available under this scheme for both new and existing woodlands. Support for enclosure with a deer fence is available when deer damage has occurred after establishment. Support may also be available for a hare fence where hare damage has occurred after establishment.

See www.agriculture.gov.ie or www.teagasc.ie/forestry for further details.